

Ideational Metafunction in the Grade 11 English Textbook: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract

The present study explores the representation of the ideational metafunction in the Grade 11 English textbook used in Pakistani institutions. It is based on Halliday's (1994) theoretical framework, which examines how language is used to construct experiential meanings in selected sections of the textbook. The study employs a qualitative research design to identify different process types, including material, mental, and relational processes, as well as the participants and circumstances associated with them. The data is taken from the selected lessons from the Grade 11 English textbook. The detailed textual analysis is done to identify the major types of meaning representation and how actions, thoughts, and experiences are expressed in language in the textbook. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to demonstrate the use of language in textbooks in an educational context and to emphasize the importance of meaning-making through language in second language learning. The findings of the study provide insight for teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers who are interested in exploring how textbooks are analyzed and evaluated in terms of discourse. Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature in Applied Linguistics about the different types of experience that constitute the meaning of educational discourse.

Keywords: Systematic Functional Linguistics, Transitivity analysis, Grade 11, English textbook

Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in shaping knowledge, experience, and understanding in educational contexts (Alameda-Hernández & Jiménez-Briones, 2025). Textbooks, as the primary source of academic input, do not passively transmit information, but construct particular views of reality through linguistic choices (Maryam, Anwar, Shoaib & Rasool, 2021). One of the important ways in which meaning-making through language is the ideational metafunction proposed by Halliday (1994). This metafunction is about how language represents human experience, such as actions, thoughts, and relationships, through different process types such as material, mental, and relational processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

The Grade 11 English textbook, one of the major sources of instruction used in colleges for English language teaching in Pakistan. Its content is important but has been little studied in terms of the construction of experiential meanings. The representation of experience in language in textbooks is important because it influences the ways in which students understand knowledge, make

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sense of events, and develop their cognitive and linguistic skills (Butt, 2009). Thus, this study aims to investigate the realization of the ideational metafunction in the Grade 11 English textbook through qualitative analysis of selected textual data.

This study is of both theoretical and practical significance. In terms of theoretical significance, this study contributes to existing knowledge in the discipline of Applied Linguistics by giving insight into experiential meaning-making in educational discourse. This study expands the existing literature on textbook analysis by giving detailed information on ideational metafunction in Pakistan, where much work has not been conducted on it, particularly in higher education.

This research may contribute to language instructional material writers, i.e., teachers, curriculum developers, and textbook writers, by showing the nature of language patterns appearing in teaching materials. This research helps to understand the extent of action-oriented approach, thought-oriented approach, or relational approach employed in textbooks that eventually leads to better teaching and a better proportion of language use in materials. In addition, it provides a teacher with a better pedagogical framework for teaching language comprehension skills and awareness of language's influence on learners. This research also aims at increasing consciousness about the importance of language in teaching materials and language learning outcomes.

Research Questions

- a. How is the ideational metafunction realized in the Grade 11 English textbook?
- b. How are experiential meanings constructed through process types, participants, and circumstances in the selected textbook?

Literature Review

Ideational metafunction is an important part of the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) state that when humans communicate, they use language to simultaneously exercise the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. The ideational metafunction refers to the representation of human experience or reality through language (Rafelina & Hermawan, 2022). This represents the means of language to express experiential meaning, via the concept of a transitivity system comprising clause types or different processes, namely material processes (actions), mental processes (cognition/perception/emotion), relational processes (states), this co-existing with participants/circumstances, enables researchers to study discourse systematically in terms of how meanings are constructed, and transitivity has been used extensively in linguistic and education research (Bakuuro, 2017).

Researchers have studied different types of literature, print and digital media, and academic textbooks to explore the nature of language and to evaluate the function of language in general (Noor & Anwar, 2019). Textbooks provide critical support for both teachers and students in classroom activities and play an essential role in helping students learn material and share knowledge. Language used in a textbook is not simply a way to communicate ideas but is implicitly integrated through certain ideologies and pedagogies that can be observed through how the relationships and actions of the text are presented by researchers to understand how they impact students' perceptions of the world around them. Therefore, researchers are able to comprehend how students develop perceptions of reality by using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze the

language used in educational materials. The analysis of a textbook through SFL gives researchers insight into the author's selected choices while writing, where these choices have a direct impact on what students learn (Djatkika et al., 2022). So, textbooks are an important source for student learning, and Systemic Functional Linguistics is a helpful tool for evaluating textbooks in general.

Recently, more focus has been placed on the application of transitivity analysis to English language textbooks. Qasim (2025) found a predominance of material processes, indicating that the text emphasizes actions and processes that bring about observable changes in the world. He claims that such emphasis does not accommodate "the internal experiences of thinking and emotions", the latter usually represented by mental processes and thus could lead to an unbalanced engagement by the students which prioritizes facts and processes over thoughts and interpretations.

Likewise, Darong and Regus (2024) investigated EFL textbook discourse by applying an SFL model and pointed out the crucial functions of transitivity, mood, and nominal group in making meaning (Eggins, 2004). Their work reveals that process types are functional in making thematic patterns in the content of experiential nature, and also guide the readers on how to interpret the texts in the textbooks (Aulia et al., 2025). In their opinion, mastering the analysis of linguistic patterns can help educators to better adjust teaching instructions and enable students to grasp language structures.

Besides individual research studies, research trends have also been investigated. For example, Istiqomah and Abdurrahman (2025) reviewed studies related to SFL-based textbook research conducted from 2020 to 2025. It was found that, in terms of approaches used in SFL-based textbook research, ideational metafunction with its transitivity analysis has been most utilized in most of the research. It was also identified that most of the research has dealt with primary and secondary school textbooks, and the research studies on higher education textbooks are relatively lacking (Anwar & Maryam, 2017). The research has been dominated by studies conducted in English-speaking countries, and studies in other contexts, particularly in a country like Pakistan, are sparse.

While the use of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in examining textbooks has increased, there is considerable research yet to be done related specifically to Grade 11 English textbooks sold at Pakistani colleges. Many past studies have focused either on Grade 11 textbooks lower than the Grade level or have utilized a more general or gender perspective (Shah, Anwar, Ahmed, 2017; Rasool, Asif & Anwar, 2019) but have not conducted a detailed look at how experiential meaning is created, particularly at the college level. Therefore, more research must be conducted in order to understand how experiential meanings are created at the grade 11 college level. This study will provide qualitative analysis of ideational metafunction within a grade 11 English textbook in order to help develop more of a complete understanding of how language is used within the context of education in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics theory presented by Halliday (1994). It defines language as a social semiotic system that is deployed to make meaning in context. The theory emphasizes that language makes use of three simultaneously occurring meta-

functions, namely the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. The study focuses on the ideational metafunction among them, which refers to the representational functions of language; namely the linguistic representation of human experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

Through the transitivity system, language also accounts for the ideational metafunction. This is where different types of process are analyzed in terms of a representation of the world of human action, cognition and perception, being, and relationship (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Transitivity describes three types of process: material (doing and happening), mental (sensing, thinking, feeling) and relational (being and relating). Each type of process has at least one participant, such as an actor, goal, sensor, and carrier, and an optional participant or circumstance that provides information about circumstances such as time, place, manner, and cause (Halliday, 1994). The system, therefore, explicates what individuals mean when talking about experiences.

The ideational metafunction of text analysis is also valuable when looking at textbooks and the ways that knowledge is constructed within them and imparted to the students. Textbooks are key in creating learners' experiences of things, actions, and language choices within them represent experiences, actions, and ideas. Looking at process types, participants, and circumstances allows analysts to find meaning patterns in the text and help to identify whether action-based, cognition-based, or relation-based knowledge is emphasized (Aulia et al., 2025).

In this paper, the ideational metafunction has been chosen as the main framework for analyzing the representation of experiential meaning in a Grade 11 English textbook. A qualitative approach will be applied to analyze certain excerpts of textbooks to determine different process types and their functions in clauses. Using this theory helps in a systematic analysis of language in an educational context.

Methodology

The present research is qualitative in nature. It is used to observe the realization of the ideational metafunction in a Grade 11 English textbook for Pakistani colleges. A qualitative research design is appropriate since the study deals with the interpretation of meanings and language features (Gabbianelli, 2022). Selected prose and reading sections from the textbook were collected through purposeful sampling, which comprises language forms where the experiences can be realized.

This study employs the clause as its unit of analysis using Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics. Texts chosen for the study are thoroughly reviewed, and sentences are split into clauses. Transitivity is employed to account for the different types of processes involved – Material (actions and events), Mental (thinking, feeling and perception) and Relational (states of being and relations), as well as the Participants involved (e.g. actor, goal, sensor, carrier etc.) and circumstances (time, place, manner etc.) within each clause.

In order to analyze the data, an organized process is undertaken, involving the choice of appropriate texts, dividing texts into clauses, identifying the types of processes, classifying participants and circumstances, and analyzing the patterns of meaning (Istiqomah & Abdurrahman, 2025). The presentation is descriptive, in order to explain the language as an experience with evidence from the textbook. It is a largely qualitative study, and a few frequency observations may be incorporated to highlight main tendencies (Briones, 2016).

This analysis focuses solely on the Grade 11 English textbook and considers only the ideational metafunction without examining the interpersonal and textual metafunctions. As the data was collected from educational material readily available in public, no ethical issues have arisen, and the sources have been clearly stated.

Data Collection

The source of the data used in the research is the Grade 11 English book published by the Punjab Textbook Board. The reasons for selecting the mentioned book were: (i) it is widely adopted and prescribed in all colleges of Pakistan for imparting instruction in the intermediate level courses; (ii) it is of academic significance; and (iii) it highly influences the language learning and cognition of the students. The most important objective of this research was to extract experience-meaning-rich sections of the text and to find out the textually identifiable pattern of expression in order to see how adequately ideational metafunction is employed.

A purposive sampling method is utilized in the selection of appropriate data for the study. This method selects three prose texts to serve as data, namely, 'Clean Water', 'Responsibility of the Youth in Nation-Building' and 'a couple of very elementary reading passages'. These texts are chosen as they contain words, phrases and sentences that employ argumentative, narrative and descriptive styles and a sufficient number of agents, actions and states. Other forms of text such as poems, exercises and short answer questions were omitted because of inadequate full clausal structures.

The data comprised textual extracts from the selected lessons. Each course is read multiple times to ensure that all linguistic and contextual elements are understood fully. Relevant sentences are located and collected into another dataset. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the clause is viewed as the basic unit of analysis, and therefore, these sentences are then broken down systematically into clauses. Each clause generally encodes a different process. This segmentation is essential to correctly identify the construction of experiential meaning.

After clause segmentation, the extracted data is arranged into a structured analytical table. The table, based on the transitivity framework, includes the participant (subject), process (verb), process type (material, mental and relational), participant role (goal or attribute) and circumstance (time, location, manner or cause). This systematic arrangement encourages clarity, consistency and ease of analysis, and allows the researcher to find trends in many phrases.

Table 1: Responsibility of the Youth in Nation Building (Text 1)

No.	Participant	Process	Process Type	Participant Goal/Attribute	Circumstance
1	Youth	Play	Material	an important role	in the development of a nation
2	They	Build	Material	The future of the country	-
3	They	Realize	Mental	Their responsibilities	-
4	They	work	Material	-	Hard for progress

Table 2: Clean Water (Text 2)

No.	Participant	Process	Process Type	Participant Goal/Attribute	Circumstance
1	Clean Water	Is	Relational	Essential	For life
2	People	Need	Mental	Water	For drinking and farming
3	Many areas	Face	Material	Water shortage	-
4	Government	Take	Material	Action	-
5	Government	Solve	Material	This problem	-

Table 3: General Educational Passage (Text 3)

No.	Participant	Process	Process Type	Participant Goal/Attribute	Circumstance
1	Students	Learn	Mental	New skills	In college
2	They	Develop	Material	Their abilities	-
3	They	Develop	Material	Their abilities	Through practice
4	Good education	Helps	Material	Them succeed	In life

Data Reliability and Organization

Every sentence is read critically and checked several times in order to guarantee the correct and authentic use of the data collected. Sentences are divided and classified according to specific, unchanged categories, thus allowing for no misinterpretation or classification. It is possible to use tables to analyze a larger amount of data and to establish logical trends between them. Data exclusively involves writing and excludes pictures, exercises, or others. This is the guarantee of a certain methodological integrity in accordance with the research's purpose.

Summary of Data Collection

In light of all the discussion, data collection is intended to enhance credibility, reliability, and richness of data collection. The creation of the structured dataset used in this study can thus serve as the starting point for a further analysis of the construction of meaning and significance of personal Grade 11 English Text experiences, thereby enabling a more profound investigation into how meaning is constructed in Grade 11 English textbooks. The additional sections of this study may supplement the further analysis of process types, participants and conditions that have been developed from the structured dataset.

Data Analysis

In order to carry out an investigation on how the ideational metafunction has been represented in the Grade 11 English textbook, the present study has made use of qualitative analysis. The study has been performed through a Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective where language has been understood as a resource for creating meanings. Therefore, what is analyzed in the present study is how the experiential meaning is expressed by means of the transitivity system used in selected clauses from the textbook: processes, participants, and circumstances.

The data is presented in table format and then systematically examined in order to locate patterns of language and the way these patterns are used in constructing the depiction of experience in instructional talk. While the description is predominantly qualitative, some references are made to the proportion of process categories observed to assist with interpreting the data.

Analysis of Process Types

Material Processes (Processes of Doing and Happening)

The most evident phenomenon in the sample observed is material process, generally in the presence of an Actor and sometimes a Goal; it expresses physical actions, events, and happenings. In the corpus, there are numerous samples, as shown:

- Youth play an important role in the development of a nation
- They build the future of the country
- Government takes action to solve this problem
- They work hard for progress

With the focus being on physical processes within the textbook, it can suggest that experience-creation comes first through action/doing. Regarding the learning objective on creating responsible citizens, it could lead to a high emphasis placed on participation, production, and responsibility.

Mental Processes (Processes of Sensing)

Mental processes are less commonly used than material processes. They represent processes relating to the internal experience, i.e., thought, perception, and feeling. A mental process has two participants: Senser and Phenomenon:

- They realize their responsibilities
- People need water for drinking and farming
- Students learn new skills

The inclusion of mental processes indicates that in addition to external actions, the text incorporates areas such as awareness, understanding, and learning, where the students are encouraged to reflect upon their needs, their role, and their schooling. Their relatively lower frequency indicates that the focus is on external acts, which exist in the discourse as the other primary elements.

Analysis of Participants

Participants involved in different processes are symbolized by those included in the clauses observed. The information displays a regular use of plural and generic participants. The participants include:

- Youth
- Students
- People
- Government
- A nation

These constant references to the same group members may signify a collective, socially based, and value-oriented discourse with emphasis on group responsibility. In the textbook, an overall perspective focuses on the importance of group processes for societal development rather than individual experiences. It is consistent with the goal of the textbook to raise socially responsible members of society, and as for active participants (Actors or Sensors), it refers to people when it is material or mental processes. This means that people or groups can be in the position to make certain things happen.

Analysis of Circumstances

The circumstances provide further descriptive details related to the main processes. Circumstances give details such as when, where, how, why, and for what reason in a clause. Data used as examples are:

- In the development of a nation
- For drinking and farming
- Through education and discipline
- Hard for progress

These types of contextual details help establish the processes and make the interaction more didactic. They put the behavior into the appropriate circumstances and the context of the behavior. The context provides a depth and richness to the meaning of the experience that helps the students read the text more accessible and with more understanding.

Overall Patterns and Interpretation

The distribution of types of processes shows a distinct tendency in constructing experiential meaning in the textbook: Material process prevails, showing the text's emphasis on doing, acting, and participating in society; Mental process assists with thinking and reflection but in a limited range; Relational process provides descriptive and conceptual meanings, helping learners to form their knowledge. Such proportions indicate that the text has an action-oriented language in which knowledge construction is linked with concrete participation. However, it also incorporates mental processes and relational processes that enable the learners to do some thinking, reflection, and describing so that the proportion of each of these types of processes remains relatively close.

The data analysis points to the significance of language structures to construe experiential meaning in the Grade 11 English textbook. The analysis demonstrates that the ideational metafunction is realized in the form of material processes with accompanying mental and relational processes. The configuration demonstrates an educational discourse foregrounding action, agency and society with the accompaniment of cognition and description. The analysis has revealed the indispensability of language as the medium to realize knowledge and develop learners' worldviews.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present research revealed that ideational metafunction is highly realized in Grade 11 English textbook via specific kinds of processes, participants, and circumstances that work together to construct the experience. The qualitative findings proved that the material processes were dominant, in that the experience had mainly been expressed as an experience in processes, participants, and circumstances. Clauses like "Youth play an important role", "They build the future",

and “Governments take action” made the learners appear as active agents who were supposed to take purposeful and useful actions. This implied that the book tried to convey an action-oriented view of learning where the experience itself was intertwined with life experience, responsibility, and society. Through these presentations, the discourse gave encouragement to students to see themselves as the builders of society and the country and cultivated discipline, diligence, participation, etc.

Besides material processes, there existed a few mental processes that helped express internal experiences such as thought, perception, and cognition. By using verbs like “realize, learn, need”, the textbook attempted to present internal cognition and reflection so that learners could be aware of their roles and responsibilities. The limited occurrence of such processes might show that mental and reflective processes have less significance than physical processes. Lack of mental and reflective processes might also result in less involvement of students in deeper cognition because the integration of mental processes could lead to critical reflection.

Relational processes also added descriptive and explanatory power to the textbook by identifying and attributing values. Examples like ‘Clean water is necessary for life’ and ‘A country becomes powerful’ demonstrated the use of relational processes to offer factual and conceptual information. The definition of concepts and the assignment of values were crucial for the development of conceptual knowledge and how a learner perceived various concepts and their importance. Though they were less prevalent than material processes, they were still very important for the information acquisition function.

The examination also indicated that the textbook predominantly used collective and general participants such as youths, people, students, and governments that represented a type of discourse concerned with mutual obligation and social identity. Here, collective subject-verb association underlined social values over an individual point of view and stimulated the learners to be identified as members of society. In addition, circumstances-for example, “in the development of a nation”, “for drinking and farming”, “through education and discipline”-also supplemented meaning by adding context to the clause, indicating under what conditions and how the action was performed.

Experiential meaning in the textbook was constructed by focusing much on actions and interaction, together with a touch of thinking and description. This was consistent with the findings of prior research studies on educational discourse, in which it had been shown that material process was preponderant. More importantly, this research specifically offered a contribution to the Pakistani context in the way experiential meaning was constructed in Grade 11 English textbook in college.

To conclude, ideational metafunction has a superior role in creating meanings in the textbook. Even though the dominance of the material process presents a discourse practice of doing and being, and the function of responsibility and society, the existence of the mental and relational processes allows a coexistence of concepts and knowledge. Yet an equal proportion of these processes will play an important role for students to gain learning and the capacity to think. This study has shown its effort in Applied Linguistics in general, the processes of the construction of meaning during learning materials and their pedagogical implications in teaching language as

well as in writing textbooks, especially encouraging textbook authors and teachers to make use of diverse language in textbooks.

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